

To determine a weight guideline, we consider a horse to be “in good flesh” when you cannot SEE the ribs but you can FEEL them with just a hint of pressure. In winter, make sure you are getting under the coat as that can be very deceiving. Many owners prefer their athletes a bit more lean, but without that cellular fuel, performance can actually be lessened.

OVERWEIGHT

Chunky horses are often referred to as “easy keepers.” In actuality, such horses may be insulin-resistant or glucose-intolerant (*body produces too much insulin, or cells become unable to use it, resulting in elevated blood sugar/glucose resulting in possible damage to circulatory system, adrenals, pancreas, pituitary, thyroid, etc. just like in people*). Either of these conditions can indicate incipient diabetes and/or Cushing’s disease. Sometimes the “fat” is really edema or water weight from over-feeding alfalfa or high protein feeds. You will know this is the case if your horse drops all the excess weight within a week or so of removing such feeds from its diet.

The standard DYNAMITE® Program (**Free Choice** minerals: **DynaPro**, **NTM Salt, 1 to 1, 2 to 1, & Izmine**; **Regular, Plus** or **TNT**) often works miracles with such horses and they become lean and muscled. Others may need some extra chromium to balance out their metabolism and blood sugar levels. GTF Chromium from yeast, available at health food stores, frequently will prove effective with cresty horses. Generally speaking, 200 mcg is sufficient although at least one pony of whom we have heard was up to 1000 mcg per day for a while before going back down to normal levels. We understand he can now eat free choice grass hay without a problem, but if his owners let his chromium level drop, he gets fat again.

Which brings up a point that most ponies simply should not have grain or alfalfa at all; if they need higher calories for hard work, some **HES** may be added at a quarter of a cup per day building up slowly to appropriate levels for that animal. In fact, **HES**-based **TNT** has proven superior for ponies in doses appropriate for their weights and work levels.

UNDERWEIGHT

An underweight condition can be associated with starvation, poor dentition, ulcers, parasite overload, parasite over-treatment (toxicity), or digestive challenges on up to possible cancers or other serious health concerns. You may wish to have bloodwork drawn, fecals examined or simply proceed as per our nutritional, common sense approach. Regardless, it would be wise to have an equine dentist do a full evaluation as opposed to a quick float. Once dental problems are corrected, many horses will start to regain lost weight.

We have found many underweight horses simply are not receiving enough hay. Too many people try to parcel grass hay out in “flakes” rather than giving it free choice: most 1,000# horses require 25±# hay per day with working horses requiring more. To produce necessary weight, some owners heap up sweet feed mistakenly thinking that will provide needed calories. Unfortunately all this does is encourage insulin resistance and overload the gut risking colic or even impac-

tion. Free choice grass, fresh and dried, is what horses evolved on and it is that which will supply most needs (except minerals in this era); NOT grain. Take a look at horses on summer pasture and nothing else; most are quite plump and sassy!

In our experience of rescue horses who were starving, feeding 3-4 (or more) times per day, beginning with small amounts, is critical. ALWAYS the free choice grass hay and DYNAMITE® minerals: **NTM Salt, 1 to 1, 2 to 1, & Izmine**. We prefer **PGR** to feed-store grain for numerous reasons but in this case particularly for its digestibility. With severely underweight horses we start slowly, maybe 1-2 cups each feeding gradually increasing that amount to no more than (and sometimes less depending on size and age) 2 quarts per feeding. The **PGR** is moistened with a squirt of **DynaPro** and perhaps ½ oz. of **DynaSpark** each time and enough pure water to make it easy to ingest without possibility of choke; some people prefer to turn it into a real “soup.” Once the horse can take this down well, we start adding, for an adult, 2 oz. of **Regular** and 1-2 cups **HES** per day divided into the individual feedings. Or use 2 cups of **TNT** in the same manner, especially for geriatrics who usually have joint involvement as well. Horses who are underweight but not starving can be moved into the larger amounts sooner. As long as there are no other health challenges, and depending on individual needs, horses should start gaining healthful weight (meaning muscle, not water or fat) fairly quickly. As the horse nears an ideal looking weight, slowly pull back on larger **PGR/HES** amounts until the weight equalizes. There are no absolute amounts; this is where the “art” of feeding comes in.

Unfortunately, too many people see an underweight horse, immediately surmise “worms” and pump chemical wormers into an already debilitated body. If the horse remains thin, they’ll do it again and sometimes yet again. Such overuse of strong medications can cause not only toxic overload but also ulcers and blood in stools and urine. We prefer building horses up nutritionally before doing a fecal. If the count is 200+, we detoxify herbally or deworm with Safeguard.

If a horse looks longingly at its food but backs down from actually eating; paces while and after eating; becomes excessively cranky at feeding times; takes a few bites and walks away for a while, etc., you might consider that ulcers are at the root of such behavior. We have found that 1 tablespoon of **Miracle Clay**, activated as per label directions, syringed into the horse’s mouth along with 10 cc of **DynaPro** about 2-3x per day seems to see them through the discomfort quite rapidly so they can get into the longer term healing process by eating their other DYNAMITE® nutrients. Once they are eating normally, simply plop the spoonful of **Clay** directly onto the **PGR**; most horses gobble it right up. Adding a teaspoon of **DynaSpark** to the **Clay** also ensures it is rapidly consumed while adding necessary electrolytes. Continue as long as it seems appropriate.

Most horses will do superbly if you follow these suggestions, but serious health challenges and tooth problems need to be addressed separately. ■